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TAGS: PGOV PREL KWBG KPAL IS RS

SUBJECT: RUSSIAN PROPOSAL FOR MIDDLE EAST EXPERTS' MEETING

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) On November 19, Counselor in the MFA Middle East Peace Settlement Office Timur Zabirov elaborated on GOR interest in holding a high-level experts' meeting on the Middle East Peace Process in Moscow following the Annapolis Conference. The GOR intended this forum to maintain momentum toward a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement. Zabirov said that the GOR had determined neither the list of attendees nor the agenda for the experts' meeting, both of which would depend upon the outcome at Annapolis. Zabirov stressed that press reports on the alleged statement by Deputy Foreign Minister Saltanov that Russia intended to convene a "regional summit" were inaccurate and that the DFM had only referred to the GOR proposal for an experts' meeting.

¶2. (C) Zabirov explained that the proposed Moscow meeting was not new and that the GOR had first offered it as early as ¶2005. If the experts' meeting made progress, the GOR could conceivably sponsor a regional conference to address a variety of issues including Israeli disputes with Lebanon and Syria. Zabirov stressed that the GOR understood that progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the "key" to settling other issues.

¶3. (C) Zabirov told us that the GOR delegation to Annapolis would consist of Foreign Minister Lavrov, DFM Saltanov and Special Representative for the Middle East Sergey Yakovlev. The MFA welcomed confirmation of a meeting between Lavrov and the Secretary on November 26.

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